

319

INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT  
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

This material contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Laws, Title 18, U.S.C. Secs. 793 and 794, the transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

COUNTRY	Hungary	REPORT NO.		50X1
SUBJECT	Status of Literature, Theater, Films, and Opera	DATE DISTR.	1 December 1955	
		NO. OF PAGES	4	
DATE OF INFO.		REQUIREMENT NO.	RD	50X1
PLACE ACQUIRED		REFERENCES		
DATE ACQUIRED				
SOURCE:				50X1
				50X1

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

STATE	#X	ARMY	#X	NAVY	#X	AIR	#X	FBI	AEC					
(Note: Washington distribution indicated by "X"; Field distribution by "#").														

INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT NO. [REDACTED]

50X1

COUNTRY Hungary

DATE DISTR. 18 Oct. 1955

50X1

SUBJECT Status of Literature, Theater, Films,  
and Opera

NO. OF PAGES 3

DATE OF INFORMATION [REDACTED]

REFERENCES:

50X1

PLACE ACQUIRED [REDACTED]

50X1

SOURCE [REDACTED]

1. When the Imre Nagy Government was in power, there was relative freedom of expression in various fields of artistic life. The State lessened its terror and control and the Party line changed. The Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party openly criticized its own failures in Szabad Nép and, every day, that newspaper published some satiric criticism about the régime. As a result, the population felt encouraged to criticize the régime, knowing there would be no consequences. This new "freedom", naturally, had its effect on the Hungarian literary field.
2. The first change made was in the presidency of the Union of Writers when Peter Veres was elected president. Although Veres co-operated with the Communists, he had not been an officer in the Soviet Army as was the Union's former president, the "Moscovite" Béla Illés. The Union of Writers realized that if something was not done quickly to improve Hungarian literature, it would be difficult to do so later. The public did not even read the works of authors who followed the Party line as all such literature had merely consisted of worthless novels, plays, and poems about the wonderful new socialist life. There was so much prejudice about these novels and plays that practically all such material was bought only by libraries. Talented authors deliberately avoided any contemporary subjects and wrote only about the history of Hungary. Party orders and criticism could not force them to write anything which praised socialism.
3. To improve and to stimulate an interest in literature, three talented authors, who had been forbidden to write for several years, were permitted to write again. One of these writers, Ferenc Herczeg, whom Communist critics called "the servant of the ruling classes during the Horthy régime", died soon after he was "forgiven" and, thus, could do nothing for the improvement of literature. József Erdélyi, who had been imprisoned after World War II for his pro-Nazi activities and for an anti-Semitic poem, was called back to the Union of Writers because of

CONFIDENTIAL

-----

CONFIDENTIAL

-2-

50X1

his importance as the founder of the campaign for "folk poetry". The appearance of Erdelyi's first poems in important literary magazines created a wave of indignation but a still stronger indignation was expressed after the publication of a drama on Petöfi by László Németh. Németh and his work were even attacked by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and by an extreme leftist reviewer.

50X1

the National Theater was on the point of receiving permission to give a performance of Németh's latest drama about Galileo.

50X1

4. The censorship office passed some writings which reflected the true misery of socialist life in Hungary. Issues of literary magazines which contained such novels or poems had such wide interest that the population was willing to pay 100 or 200 times more for them than their actual price. Realizing the danger caused by these works which depicted the negative side of Communism, the Central Committee of the CP confiscated these issues; once, even Rákosi, himself, personally intervened in such a case. The November-December 1954 issue of Union of Writers' magazine published several poems which openly expressed their authors' mistrust and hatred of Communist life. The chief editor of the magazine, László Benjámín, who became popular with the Party and unpopular among his readers for his loud praise of Communist leaders and socialism, was in Moscow at the time this issue was published. After the issue was banned, Benjámín was blamed for being responsible for the literary riot. Rákosi wanted to defend Benjámín by declaring that Benjámín was not even in Budapest; however, Benjámín took the responsibility saying that the poems reflected his own ideas. Rákosi's defense of Benjámín was a surprise to many because he had always been considered to be a puppet in the hands of the Communists. As a result of his "confession", Benjámín was discharged from his job as chief editor.
5. Theaters which presented plays with contemporary subjects had to fill the theater's empty seats with so-called "cotton", i.e., university students and workers who had been given free tickets to the first performances. On the other hand, it was extremely difficult to obtain a ticket for performances of classical plays; for example, the National Theater in Budapest sold out all tickets three months in advance for performances of "The Tragedy of Man", which had not been shown for several years because it did not adhere to the Party line. Some persons had predicted before the first performance of this play that certain lines would probably be omitted; however, the play was given in its entirety and nothing was changed in the script.
5. The population showed great interest in other classical plays. During 1954, six or seven Shakespeare, four Molière, three Shaw, and several other plays by French, English, German, and Russian playwrights were performed in four Budapest theaters. The intense interest in these plays was not only due to the lack of modern dramas in the theaters but because the performances were of a higher standard than ever before; the settings were very picturesque, stage management was worked out to the smallest detail, and the actors gave excellent performances. This was also true of operas which were given. In this connection, source claims that one of the few positive achievements of Communism in Hungary was the fact that workers were able to frequently attend the opera because the price of tickets was so reasonable. There was such a growing interest in opera that the former Municipal Theater in Budapest had to be taken over as a second opera house.
- Another example of freedom under the Imre Nagy Government was the Fifth National Exhibition of Fine Arts which took place in Budapest in January

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

-3-



1955. Among the many paintings by impressionist, conventional, and non-Communist artists, there were also paintings by Gyula Hintz on exhibit. Hintz had been a Nazi and had refused to paint on Party orders but, finally, was permitted to exhibit his formalistic works. This was the first time in several years that art had won over the Party.

8. Hungarian film production, which was never very good, became worse with the exception of some films made about nature or history. Millions of forints were spent on the production of films but these films were not a success because they lacked both artistic and technical merit. Theaters in Hungary showed Soviet and Hungarian films but the theaters were about to close down for lack of customers. In 1954, Hungary began to import "progressive" films from the West and also showed old films which had been bought a couple of years before but which had never been shown. These "progressive" films were mostly French or Italian productions; among these films were four or five of Vittorio de Sica's which were more than realistic in depicting the sinister aspects of life in the West and, thus, served propaganda purposes in proving to the Hungarians that even if there were some failures under the Communists, life was still much better than life in the West.
9. The Party assured Hungarian artists a life with no material worries. They were given beautiful houses or apartments and received very high honors. Two or three former castles in the countryside were turned over to these artists as a place to stay for several months, free of charge, for creating further works. In Budapest, luxurious work rooms were set aside in the Parliament building where writers could work in peace several days a week.
10. During 1954, radio broadcasts were also much better. There were fewer propaganda programs and musical and literary features were of a fairly high standard. For the first time in several years, the Hungarian radio broadcast programs of Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" which, with other American music, had been previously banned.



50X1

CONFIDENTIAL